APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF FEDERAL WEBSITES

NOTE: *The materials in Appendix A were developed by Charles R. McClure for a class recently taught at Florida State University. This appendix represents a slightly different approach to many of the subjects addressed in this report. Nonetheless, the criteria listed here can be a useful tool to assess Federal websites. Hence, the authors have included the appendix for its potential usefulness to readers of the report.*

CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF FEDERAL WEBSITES

Introduction: Listed below are a number of possible criteria that can be used to assess websites, and to some degree, other types of electronic services provision in a networked environment. All of these criteria may not be appropriate for specific types of websites. The *purpose* of the website (e.g., educational, entertainment, commercial, services provision, etc.) shapes the *types* of crtieria that may be appropriate for a particular website.

I. INFORMATION CONTENT CRITERIA
This section evaluates the substantive aspects of the website

Orientation to website

- A website overview is provided (is it clear if this is a commercial, educational, advocacy, informational, or other type of website?)
- The scope of website is clearly stated.
- The services and information provided at the website are described.
- Instructions on the use of the website are provided.
- The purpose/mission should be appropriate to the targeted audience(s).
- A liability statement warning the user of information provided through the links is provided (e.g., access by children).
- Copyright statements are provided if necessary.

Content

- The content of the homepage should match the purpose/mission.
- The content and links match the needs of the expected audience.
- The website includes only necessary and useful information. content coverage does not overlap.
- The amount of information is significant and not overwhelming, is balanced throughout the website.
- There are full text references or other resources available.
- The content has rich and unique quality that inspires users to visit regularly for information.
- The content is written in a clear and consistent language style that matches the expected audience.
- Avoids jargon, humor, condescension, accusation, and chit chat.
- Uses a positive and professional tone.
- Language does not show bias.

- Content is organized logically throughout the website and by the user's needs.

Currency

- Address of contact person and last update information appears at the bottom of pages with substantive content.
- Pages should be kept up to date.
- The content provided by the website creators is up-to-date.

Bibliographic Control

- Headings are clearly phrased, descriptive and understandable.
- Each screen is titled clearly.
- If the headings cannot be completely descriptive, coherent and concise, descriptions follow.
- The information that is provided through the link matches the headings and descriptions.
- Terminology and layout are consistent within the headings throughout the website.
- Navigational tools standardized and on each page of site.

Services

- Provision of services is different than provision of information resources, (e.g.,leaving a question to be answered by the reference staff is a service).
- Are the services open to everyone on the Internet or do parts require fees?
- Services meet the needs of the user.
- Services are fully operational and if they cost money are the fees clearly presented?

Accuracy

- Statement of document/website status is provided (e.g., if in progress will note,"under construction").
- Reference or sources of information cited are accurate.
- Typing, spelling, and grammar errors and other inconsistencies are absent.

Privacy

- Degree to which the site provides users with explicit policy on how users' privacy rights are protected.
- Degree to which the site provides users with information about making public site-use information, repackaging, or selling such information to others.
- Can the user exchange encrypted information with the site?

Security

- Is the user assured that his/her use of the website is scure?
- Is encrypted use of the website possible?
- Are passwords needed to access certain parts of the website?

Availability of Log File Information

- Do users have access to basic statistics describing use of the website?
- What information does the website make publicly available regarding the use and assessment of the website?

Retrieval/Search Engine

- Does the website have its own search engine?
- Are their instructions to help the user better understand how to do searching on the website?
- What is the overall effectiveness, ease of use, and power of the search engine?

Policy Issues

- Written policies and procedures that govern the development, use, and access to the website (who is responsible for what, marketing, commercial use of the site, access by children, etc.?
- Use of Electronic Records Management policies that guide the management of the website (length of time material is on the website, approval for placing material on the website, legal liability, acceptable as evidence ina court of law. etc.?
- Preservation, archival, and scheduling of web content for future access and preservation?
- Privacy, FOIA, and other federal guidelines and laws?
- Degree to which organizational policies support broader institutional policies?

II. EASE OF USE CRITERIA

This section evaluates the physical movement through the website.

Quality of Links

- There are no dead-end links.
- Temporary forwarding addresses do not qualify as good links.
- "What's new" section provided for new links - (good for frequent users).
- Shortcut links are possible for frequent users.
- Warning statements are provided, if link will lead to large document or image.
- Indication of restricted access for a link is provided.
- Links are provided to mention documents.

Speed

- Minimal use of large graphics and bright colors so that document loading is relatively fast at slow connection speeds?
- Efficient programming of links for quick movement through the website?

Feedback Mechanisms

- On the homepage and other significant pages there is a contact person: name, address and email address of the responsible person or entity for example, "webadmin@library.org."
- Feedback links are fully operational.

Accessibility

- There is an awareness of the existence of this website through search engines or other publicity.
- Full name of website organization is provided in the title, heading, document address, graphical link and/or URL in order that the source can be recoverable.
- It is usually possible to reach the site. It is not frequently overloaded.
- The URL is not likely to be confused or mistyped.
- Consistent metadata embedded in pages to improve search engine indexing.

Design

- Format is appropriate to subject matter and functionality. A good design directs users toward information rather than away from it.
- The screens are uncluttered.
- The format is consistent throughout the website.
- The homepage for the website is short and simple.
- The website is written in standard HTML language. The site is consistent when accessed via different browsers (text and graphic).
- Graphics and color are used to lead the user through the information appropriately.
- Monster graphics are not used.
- Many little graphics are avoided.
- Use of bold, italics, blinking and other attention getting devices is appropriate.
- Icons are understandable and make sense as what they actually do.
- User has the option of turning off the automatic loading of graphics.

Navigability

- Essential instructions appear before links requiring user interaction (e.g., email).

- Navigation options are distinct and spelled out.
- Minimal user skills are required.
- All the parts work.
- Interactions are secured if they involve private information.
- Links are provided to return to website homepage on all supporting pages.
- Links are provided to assist navigation (e.g., "return to top," "return to previous page").

Video and Audio

- Applications on the site are appropriate.
- Applications work as intended and instructions to operate are clear and straight-forward
- Audio and video uses provide links to sites where the necessary "plug and play" software can be obtained and downloaded for immediate use.
- Enhances site performance and services and is not "glitz